How and why to do a PhD in Heidelberg?

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Graduate Academy
Heidelberg University

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Who am I?
Who are we?

The Graduate Academy serves as

- A central point of contact and support for young researchers (PhD and postdoctoral level) and their mentors.
- A dedicated provider for efficient and effective tools for tailor-made career development towards supporting the transition into academic careers and facilitating the identification of ambitious career opportunities outside of academia.
- A facilitator to enable the transfer of science into society.
Our mission

Serving excellent students carefully attended to by 12 different faculties across campus!

metadisciplinary skills!
Cornerstones of the PhD lifecycle...

- Win Nobel Prize
- Revolutionize your field
- Get a job at a top University
- Attend that Conference in PoDunk, MN
- Hope they have Pepperoni Pizza

Ambition over the years:
- 1st Year
- 2nd Year
- 3rd Year
- 4th Year
- 5th Year

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Cornerstones of the PhD lifecycle…

Successfully fight your 2nd year depression

Take top job

Submit your thesis
Our target audiences in numbers

- About 1200 doctorates per year (28,500 in DE in 2017)
  - Diversity matters: About 25% international PhD students
  - Gender balance: About 50% female and male graduates

©: Universität Heidelberg Jahresbericht 2017
Our target audiences in numbers

- About 1200 doctorates per year
- Four major Graduate Schools
  (Life Sciences, Mathematics, Physics, Humanities & Social Sciences)
- More than 40 structured PhD Programs
  (DFG, Excellence Cluster, EU-ITN, LGFG (MWK), participation in
  IMPRSs and Helmholtz International Graduate Schools, else)
- About 500 postdoctoral researchers*

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Heidelberg University in international comparison

http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/university/rankings/

**Best German university (for the 5th consecutive time) - Shanghai Ranking 2018**
University ranks 47th worldwide and 12th in Europe (August 15, 2018)

**Heidelberg University ranks 3rd in Germany - QS World University Ranking 2018/2019**
University ranks 64th worldwide, 18th in Europe and 3rd/3 in Germany (June 7, 2018)

**Ruperto Carola among the world’s top 50 - THE Ranking 2018/2019**
University ranks 47th worldwide, 14th in Europe and 3rd in Germany (September 26, 2018)

**Heidelberg University ranks 3rd in Germany – THE Employability Ranking 2017**
University ranks 38th worldwide, 15th in Europe and 3rd in Germany (November 14, 2018)

* Postdoctoral researchers within five years after completion of PhD
Who are YOU?

Where are you from?

What are you passionate about?

What do you most enjoy doing?

What is your way to enjoy academia?

What is your career dream?

What do you expect from doing/gaining a PhD?
What’s in for you?
What do we offer today?

Core activities Graduate Academy:

- Information services & consultancy (Beratung)
- Sponsorship for doctoral candidates (Förderung)
- Career development support (Seminarprogramm/ Karriereentwicklung)
- Service on demand for faculties & structured programs: Supporting the advancement of excellent PhD framework conditions (e.g. heiDOCS)
Information services & consultancy

Janelle Ramaley
Chiara Rottaro
David Jara
Anna-Lena Klein
Getting prepared

The official stuff:

- Visa?
- Health insurance?
- Transcripts of your degree certificates? (never ever hand in any originals!!!)

How to?

- Registration in heiDOCS (Doktorandenportal; ZDB)
- Supervision agreement (Betreuungsvereinbarung)
- Admission to faculty (Annahme als Doktorand)
- Enrollment at university (Immatrikulation)
- Binational Doctoral Training (Cotutelle)
- ...

On a private level:

- Accommodation?
- Transportation?
- Settling in as a family
- ...

Online doctoral file - heiDOCS portal

Online Doctoral File
Please register to the heiDOCS-Portal at:
www.uni-heidelberg.de/universitaet/heidocs

Zentrales Doktorandenbüro · Seminarstraße 2 · 69117 Heidelberg
Support Online-Promotionsakte · Tel. +49 6221 54-12204 · zdb@uni-heidelberg.de

Anke Rösel          Christine Schilling          Andreas Klinkhof
Getting started

1.) Welcome events

2.) Welcome pack

3.) Teaser Trainings: Primers for Predocs

An introductory seminar series:

Dimensions:
- 10-12 sessions, one per week, starting each semester from afresh

Format:
- **Modular**: each of the weekly sessions is dedicated to a specific topic
- **Short**: sessions take half a day max.
- **Interactive**: short expert presentation(s) followed by panel discussion and/or small group discussions
- **Distributed**: integrative schedule including all campus areas
Sponsorship for doctoral candidates

Elif Avcu
Birgit Bell
David Jara
Janina Diefenbach
Michael Kraft
Sponsorship for doctoral candidates – status quo

- Fellowships for doctoral candidates (Landesgraduiertenförderung; LGF)
  - Individual 3-year fellowships
  - Completion fellowships (3-6 month)
  - Small-scale PhD programs (Promotionskollegs)

- Short term fellowships (DFG; Exzellenzinitiative)
  - Travel stipends (courses, conferences, collaborations, field trips)
  - Stipends for printing costs (contribution)
  - Short term fellowships towards completion of PhD (also STIBET; DAAD)

- Support towards identification of suitable (external) fellowships for (international) doctoral candidates

- Support towards establishing a meaningful application/exposé writing
Career development support

Dr. Berenike Schröder
Martin Stier
Jonathan Griffith
Jasmin Schröck
Communication & events

Dr. Claudia Falk
Eric Herbst
David Weinand
Gesa Siebert
Moving towards a three-layered strategy:

- **Foundations** – available every semester
  - Standard skill set
  - Courses, workshops & e-learning

- **Inspirational topics** – available annually
  - Builds on existing skills & knowledge
  - May require preparation
  - Face-to-face seminars & coaching

- **Overarching themes** - throughout the course of a PhD
  - Seminar & lecture series
  - Small group meetings
  - Excursions
  - …
Career development support – *status quo*

- Seminar and workshop program (20-25 courses p.a. in D & E)
- Academic writing support (D/E)
- German language courses
- Endnote/Citavi

Heidelberg International Summer School 2018 (collaboration GA & D7)

Collaborations across campus
- PhD Offices across campus (“Zirkel Promotion”)
- Graduate programs
- Center for Teaching & Learning
- Human Resources Department
- Career Service (new program!)
- International Relations Office
- Heidelberg Alumni Office
What is a PhD?
What is a PhD?

PhD / Ph.D. / Dphil / Doctorate

BR AM Latin Germanism

Doctor of philosophy - Definition

- **Oxford Dictionary**: the highest college or university degree, or someone who has this.

- **Wikipedia**: is the highest university degree that is conferred after a course of study by universities in most English-speaking countries.

- **Amazon.de**:
How much of an academic career do I want?
What does a PhD entail?

The degree is conferred for producing **independent, original research** that expands the limits of current knowledge (can be published in a peer-reviewed journal).

- Identifying a PhD-worthy **research question**
- Pursuing original independent **research**
- Writing a **dissertation** (thesis) about the new findings
- **Submitting** the dissertation
- **Defending** the thesis (against experts in the field)
- **Publishing** the findings
- Being **promoted** to PhD (award of the title)
- Using the **title** Doctor (as awarded!!!)

- In non-English-speaking countries, variants such as "Dr. phil.“, “Dr. rer. nat.”, “Dr. med.” are in use.

- In English spoken countries often abbreviated "Dr" or "Dr." or with post-nominal letters such as "Ph.D.", "PhD", or "DPhil" (depending on the awarding institution).

- Never use both, the title and post-nominals, at the same time!
What is special about doing a PhD?

- You are not a student any more

- At Heidelberg University: PhD research is the first phase of a professional research experience and NOT(!) a third cycle of studies

- Independence (various degrees of)

- Life in a sandwich position

- Preparing for growth and leadership
What is expected from me when doing a PhD? (I)

Exhausted or ready for taking off?
What is expected from me when doing a PhD? (II)

- Passion to perform ✓

- Taking pleasure in (interdisciplinary) thinking, in writing and in contributing

- A profile matching a supervisor’s mentor’s expectations regarding the requirements of a specific project

- Enthusiasm, curiosity, dedication, creativity, diligence ...

- Becoming a valuable team member!

\* where excellence originates ...
Why to do a PhD?

X good reasons (not do) do a PhD…

- Excited about learning and solving problems
- In love with thinking, writing & freedom of thought
- Enthusiastic about doing research
- Genuinely interested in the subject area
- Want to set the stage for life-long learning
- Want the title
- Deemed important for my career aspirations
- Want to become a professor

- Interested in the training programme
- Admire my supervisor
- Curious about the university doings

- I was always a successful & diligent student
- No better job in sight

? !
How to prepare for a PhD? (I)

- Talk and listen to your peers
  - [https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07332-x](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07332-x)
    Article by recent PhD graduate Lucy A. Taylor sharing the advice she and her colleagues wish they had received (06/11/2018): Twenty things I wish I’d known when I started my PhD.

- Test your abilities (validated tests only!)
    Academics in collaboration with Heidelberg University (Institute for Psychology) is developing a test for assessing personality traits, skills and qualifications relevant for a successful PhD (beta-version only).
  - [https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/](https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/)
    A free, web-based career-planning tool that was created to help graduate students and postdocs in the sciences define and pursue their career goals.
  - [https://www.bachelorprint.de/promotion](https://www.bachelorprint.de/promotion)
    Checklists by Schneider & Molitor (on-line or book) - basis for the 2004 nation-wide THESIS-Study)

- Talk to your previous academic advisor(s) & mentor(s)
How to prepare for a PhD? (II)

- What is the subject area/research question you are interested in?
- Identify your “doctorfather” or “doctormother”
- Agree on a PhD-worthy research topic
- Set-up your personal funding plan
- Get a copy of your faculty’s “Promotionsordnung” – become acquainted with the specific rules and regulations
- Sign a “supervision agreement”
- Register with heiDOCS – and create your personal copy of the on-line PhD file
- Apply for admission as a PhD candidate with your faculty
- Register with Heidelberg University as a PhD-student (Immatriculation for PhD candidates)

- Focus on your research and your skills portfolio!
How to finance a PhD?

- Your PhD is financed by integration into your (university) supervisor’s team:
  - Departmental position; (most likely) integrated in research and teaching at your department
  - Third party funding
  - You pursue an “external” PhD

- You are pursuing a job outside of your PhD project
  - You hold a contract somewhere within the university (e.g. “Geprüfte Wissenschaftliche Hilfskraft”)
  - You have a job elsewhere

- You hold a fellowship/you are (preparing to) applying for a fellowship

- You are naturally born rich 😊
How to structure a PhD?

### Individual PhD

**Typical characteristics**
- Single supervisor
- Thesis subject solely agreed upon with supervisor; may or may not be embedded in broader context
- No obligatory course work
- No formal definition for time-to-submission

### Structured PhD

**Typical characteristics**
- Multiple supervisors/mentors (thesis advisory committee (TAC))
- Research topic is embedded in a doctoral program [Promotionskolleg (5-10), Graduiertenkolleg (up to 25), Graduiertenschule (≥ 100)]
- Requires formal application/admission
- Overarching funding/funding rules
- Programs define (disciplinary) training curricula
- Programs are set for 3-4 years of PhD research until submission
- Regular performance reviews

**Exploration elements**
- Co-tutelles, research abroad; conferences & summer schools; meta-disciplinary skills training & Graduate Academy
How to structure a PhD?

**Individual PhD**

- Participate in welcome events (department, GS, GA, else)
- Get to know your peers and colleagues
- Network in an interdisciplinary fashion
- Go to lectures, PhD seminars, else…
- Get organized: Make sure to have regular meetings with your supervisor(s), compile your strategic questions, foster your critical thinking
- Get acquainted with basics in project management, research ethics & good scientific practice, avoiding plagiarism, mental health, statistics, …
- Keep talking & writing - about your research, your career aspirations, your doubts, your disappointments, your successes
- Seek opportunities for teaching in your field and for presenting your work
- Try out applying for funding – travel, conferences, research stays, …
- Continuously work on your portfolio of qualifications and skills
- Don’t forget to strive for submission!

**Structured PhD**

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Training throughout your PhD

- **Continuous scientific training**
  - Seize the opportunities on campus to go to lectures that help you to develop a broad (interdisciplinary) scientific overview and to network

- **Mandatory courses**
  - Towards establishing equivalency of the degree you earned previously and the requirements of Heidelberg University – assessed in the context of faculty admission
  - Within the context of your PhD program/ Graduate School

- **Voluntary courses & conferences** – make it part of your work plan
  - Scientific courses/summer schools to foster subject-related expertise
  - Conferences (unwritten rule: participation usually requires own active contribution)
  - Vocational skills training & career development
  - Self-assessment tools
Enhancing general competencies
(incomplete list of examples)

- **Complementary scientific skills training**
  - Research ethics
  - Statistics

- **Personal skills training**

- **Extracurricular academic activities**
  - Doctoral fellow representation
  - Contributions to conference/workshop/meeting organization
  - Vocational skills training & career orientation/coaching
  - Teaching

- **Alumni resource**
How do I know I am ready to graduate?

SIGNS YOU’RE READY TO GRADUATE

WHEN A FORM LETTER CALLS YOU “DOCTOR” AND YOU DON’T REACT.

Huh. Dear Dr. We write to inform you that the ...

WHEN YOUR PROF. ASKS YOU TO TAKE ON ANOTHER PROJECT AND YOU SAY “NO.”

Allison, can you- No!

WHEN YOU START WINNING ARGUMENTS WITH YOUR P.I.

See? Mmm, yes, you’re right.

WHEN THE YOUNGER STUDENTS ARE GENUINELY SURPRISED TO SEE YOU IN THE LAB.

Oh. Hey. You’re here. What?

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM
What is a PhD good for?

What will you gain?
- Resilience
- Endurance
- Critical thinking
- Self esteem
- Intrinsic motivation
- Can do-attitude
- Courage
- Leadership skills
- Respect
- Friends for life

What will society expect from you?
- Resilience
- Endurance
- Critical thinking
- Initiative
- Motivation and advice
- Accountability
- Courage
- Insightfulness
- Trustworthiness

DON’T QUIT!
Entering the labor market with a PhD

What will be easier?
- Avoiding routine
- Life long learning
- Work-life integration
- Freedom of thought
- Taking responsibility
- Visibility
- Securing leadership positions
- ...

What will be harder?
- Securing your first position
- Over qualification risk
- Work-life balance
- Higher expectations
- Visibility
- You follow the job market
- ...

What are myths?
- Making more money
- Broader choice of jobs
- Job security
- ...
- ...
How to manage a PhD?

Happiness, satisfaction, resilience, work-life balance

Great –
- keep going,
- nurture
- and enjoy!

Fix it –
- talk to people
- identify sinks
- keep observing!

Drastic change is much needed –
- talk to people
- think about plan B!
Whom to contact if anything goes pear-shaped?
Avoid the fly 🐝 turning into a big white elephant…

… communication is key!
Avoid the fly 🐝 turning into a big white elephant...

Talk *(selectively!)* to

- your supervisor
- your 2nd supervisor/mentor/TAC members
- your peers or the postdoc you work with
- the student representative(s)
- the PhD program coordinator
- us – contact the Graduate Academy
- the department head / Dean of Graduate Studies
- the equal opportunity office (Gleichstellungsbüro)
- the ombudsperson

... and start talking early on; communication is key!
What is a PhD?
Where the magic happens

your comfort zone
Get in touch – stay in touch!

There is always space for YOUR ideas:

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helke.hillebrand@uni-heidelberg.de

THANK YOU & BEST OF SUCCESS!